

Emotional instability and Trauma in Paulo Coelho's *The Devil and Miss Prym***¹ K. P. Sree Lekshmi****²Dr. S. Sreelatha**

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ABSTRACT

In today's world where people face emotional crisis in one form or the other, society started to give less importance to the value of relationships. Money became a mere product to secure a balance between relationships, forgetting about the words of Francis Bacon, the famous essayist. He says that sharing the joy will increase the happiness and sharing sorrow will lessen it to half. In order to make more money in a faster way, people are following wrong ways, forgetting about the sanity of the relationships. Two main characters in Paulo Coelho's novel, *The Devil and Miss Prym* experiences emotional instability and trauma, Miss Prym and the stranger, Carlos. If money is everything then how the rich stranger faces trauma. And trauma leads him to find the ways of God to man. Miss Prym represents the poor section of society, she too suffer from emotional instability because of the treasure of the stranger. Paulo Coelho with his optimistic powerful works, awakens the lost taste of mystery and Magic and spread the message of importance of love, freedom, reawaken in life. Always a seeker of the new, he tries everything, good and bad that comes along the path. The present paper aims to analyse the trauma and the emotional instability faced by the characters in this novel.

Key Words: Trauma, Emotional instability, treasure, crisis, mystery.

Literature, a wide source of knowledge aims to study the problems of human beings in society and helps to make a better world free from all kinds of suffering.

Paulo Coelho, the Brazilian writer is one such writer, who writes novels about extraordinary things in simple ways. He gives value to every single creatures of earth. Man as a social animal must need the support of society which comprises of different group of people who are optimistic, pessimistic and so on.

In this world the positive and negative principles are mostly united in one and it can be either consider as a human conflict or a psychological experience . Doubts exists only where there is faith, credulity exists where there is doubts, and where there is morality there must be temptation. Paulo Coelho weaves the story of *The Devil and Miss Prym* through a young girl, Chantal Prym, the native of the village Viscos and a stranger who visits the village. Men are at times forced and tempted by situations. The stranger forces Chantal Prym and tempts her to commit an evil deed by showing her some bars of gold and made her to choose between good and bad that exist in every human psyche.

The Devil and Miss Prym is the third book of the trilogy, And On the Seventh Day. The first two books *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* and *Veronica Decides to Die* are published in 1994 and 1998 respectively. *The Devil and Miss Prym* is a novel which happens in a community where the people are greedy and coward. A man who is tormented by his past life enters the village and the story revolves around how the people of Viscos face the questions of life, death and power within a week's time. The integrity of being human takes a deep dimension in this novel. *The Devil and Miss Prym* is a simple tale which portrays the complexities of human mind in choosing the right or the wrong both forced by temptations.

The novel opens with the arrival of the stranger, Carlos aged between forty and fifty, entering into viscos. Berta, the old lady who watches him enter into Viscos realises that he was accompanied by a devil who she describe as, "In the flesh and dressed as a pilgrim "(4). He carries with him eleven bars of gold each weights two kilos. The next day after his arrival, he went into the east of the village, and hide his gold bars there in the earth. As it is quite normal for any strangers to make friends in the place where they enter, Carlos who gives fake identity to the hotel lady approaches Chantal Prym to make her his friend. But she denies his offer remembering her mother's words, "never to talk to strangers" (7). Chantal understand from his behaviour that he isn't, "scared of anything any more "even the

“rogue wolf”, because “he had already lost everything he valued and he was now moving blindly forward” (130).

When the stranger invited her to see something that she had seen never before, she resisted, as she was afraid. Soon her fear was replaced by a desire for adventure and is also filled with anticipation and expectation. The strangers’ intention was to examine the truth of human nature by using Chantal as a medium. He is a man searching for a truth about the mystic nature of human beings even though he is, “an extremely rich and industrious industrialist, who held sway over thousands of employees”, he finds out the truth that human beings are often confronted by temptations. Human beings when they get favourable circumstances would be capable of committing Evil”. He explains her that he was a man who has been both good and evil throughout his life”(14). By showing her the pieces of gold he digged, he wanted Chantal to make the people of Viscos, break the ten commandments, “Thou shalt not steal and Thou shalt not kill” (17). He was precisely interested in finding out the general truth, “are we living in paradise or in hell”(12). And he is not sure whether his mission in Viscos brings him peace. He made Chantal as a medium to tell other people that she had hidden some gold there, as he says, “As for telling the others, that’s precisely what I want you to do” (10).

Throughout the novel, after the meeting with the stranger, Chantal Prym faces internal struggle between morality and temptation not knowing what to do to attain the best. Exposure to the hidden treasure of the stranger made her emotionally instable and there by land in trauma. Emotional instability deeply affects an individuals functioning, which involves cognitive, physiological and behavioural factors. Francis Bacon, the famous essayist in one of his essay says about the importance of sharing feelings with others. Joy when shared will get doubled and sharing the sorrow will lessen the grief. But poor miss Prym cannot share her feelings with anyone in the village as per the request of the stranger. She feels her heart heavy with grief. At the same time, the stranger feels comfortable since he finds Chantal as a medium of sharing his sorrow.

After the meeting with the stranger, she couldn’t sleep for three night continuously dreamed of gold at night. She considered the people of Viscos as cowards as they thought life as a “pointless exercise”. She keeps on struggling with

her conscience on what to do next. She remembers that playing the part of the charitable soul was only for those who are afraid of taking a stand in life. The three dreams which is alive in her soul started fighting amongst themselves to see who was the strongest. One day, unable to withstand the temptation of gold, she, without asking permission from Carlos, the stranger, and owner of gold bars, pulled out the brick shaped gold bar from earth and made sure it was there. Sigmund Freud in his Psychoanalysis says that, the "raw materials" of a dream, what Freud calls it 'latent content', are unconscious wishes bodily stimuli while sleeping, images wrapped from the previous day's experiences, but the dream itself is the product of an intensive transformation of these materials, known as the 'dream-work'.(156).

Swami Prabuddhananda in an article says that “mind alone is the cause for everything in this life, the life of bondage, and the life of freedom”. Chantal Prym realises that there were two things that prevents us from achieving our dreams: believing them to be impossible or seeing those dreams made possible by some sudden turn of the wheel of fortune, when you least expect it. At one point she made her mind sure that she should stole the gold and left the place without allowing anybody to catch that precious moment that would change their life, forever. Human mind is a powerful force which cannot establish or assert anything beyond itself. Before the meeting with the stranger, she was able to know her limits and capabilities. But now her mind was traveling far and wide unable to take a decision which should be the most important moment of her entire life.

She knew what she could expect from life and she feels contented to live in the village which every people consider as “a paradise”. The village was once a “den of thieves” and now it is a “village of cowards” (49).The cruel whim of destiny made her to be there in Viscos and to suffer such moral dilemma. She faces moral dilemma when she is offered the opportunity to secure the eleven bars of gold for herself and living a good life at the cost of committing a murder. She had been incapable of running off with the gold, even though she had committed that crime in her soul.

The stranger, Carlos believes from his own experience in life that everyman on this earth has his hell which is “his love for his family” (67). Love is a powerful force which has the magical power of constructing and destroying people's lives. In *Confessions of a Pilgrim*, the biography of Paulo Coelho, he himself describes love

as “a kind of magic, a nuclear force that can help you realize your-self or destroy you. For me, love is at the same time most productive and most destructive force in the world”(185). Coelho’s protagonist in the novel *The Devil and Miss Prym*, Chantal, is pictured as synonyms of love. The love and dedication the stranger has for his family forced him to appear in Viscos. Chantal Prym’s love for old Berta made her change into a different person. The old lady Berta’s decision to take the sleeping pills without any second thinking shows the love and dedication she had for dead husband and also for the place where she lived so far. She was ready to give up her life for the betterment of her society. She was sure in his mind that human goodness would always triumph in the end and so evil would never bring Good.

Chantal Prym was sure enough to believe that there is no way to the people of Viscos to commit a murder in need of money. Even though she doesn’t want to risk the life of people of the entire village, the 281 inhabitants of Viscos choose Chantal Prym to be sacrificed without her knowledge. The main people who suggested her name wants to demolish Chantal as they fear she would be a threat to them if she lives, adding, “Evil must fight Evil and she deserves to be punished” (134) and they also thought, “she was not a trust worthy person, who was different from everyone else” (137).

Miss Prym uses the strangers’ proposal to explore her own desires and fears. He is a representation of the external world of temptation which is opposite to the isolated existence of the villagers. But at the crucial stage when Chantal Prym realises that she is not the sacrificer, she determines to help Berta at any cost. Like the successful hunter who always arranged things so that the prey could come to him, she thought herself as a hunter who is going to hunt the stranger, remembering the proverb she once learn from a Japanese book that “ the best way to weaken one’s enemy was to get him to believe that you were on her side”(60).

Life sets out on a challenge when one least expect, to test our courage and our willingness to change. At that time one cannot pretend that nothing has happened. When she realises that it was her responsibility to save Berta from the communal sacrifice, her attitude changed. From a poor sensitive girl, she changed into an authoritative person. If she seeks the help and support of other people she wouldn’t have saved Berta. But the very realisation of her, “it is very dangerous to believe in

other people” made her role as a saviour is a successful one.

When all the people of Viscos changed their mind to commit a murder or sacrifice a life, completely believing in the gold bar that awaited them, Chantal was stern in her mind not to allow the 281 people to do so. Even the priest who is in charge of making and moving the people to the right path is motivating the people to commit murder, making them believing in the Christian saying, “the sacrifice of the Son of God saved us all. The sacrifice of a single person” is not at all a sin. (127)

The writer finally says through Chantal Prym that “Good and Evil, morality and temptation is raging all the time in every individuals’ heart, which is the background for all angels and devils”(161). The stranger gave her all the gold he possess and thus she became a wealthy person. The final truth she learns is “Good and Evil struggles in the soul of every individual, but “a small matter of control” and choice makes the big difference. Chantal Prym’s story reminds us that our decisions in moments of crisis shape our destiny. At the end, realising the importance of integrity of one’s soul she rejects the stranger’s proposition, affirming her belief in the goodness of humanity and her own moral strength. Chantal Prym’s struggle is symbolic of the universal battle between conscience and desire. At the end of the novel, for her morality, she is relieved from her trauma and she is gifted with gold bars and became a wealthy person as she dreamed to be.

Man should build up character by giving importance to characteristic traits like self-control, compassion, service, brotherhood, truthfulness, tolerance, humility, moral strength etc. for the fulfilment of human life. While cultivating these qualities in oneself one can achieve physical, mental and spiritual progress. Only the life of spiritual goodness , leads to the path of purification thus paving the way to God.

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